

## The Monitor's View

# A stop sign for human trafficking

**Nigeria shows the political will to investigate, prosecute, and convict.**

By the Monitor's Editorial Board / June 19, 2009

It's not every day that the US government gives Nigeria a shout-out for a job well done. After all, the State Department labels this African nation's human rights record "poor" and its 2007 presidential election "seriously flawed."

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But this week, the State Department praised Africa's most populous country for its progress in prosecuting human traffickers and helping their victims. "I can't talk about Nigeria enough," said Ambassador Luis Cde-Baca, who leads the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons.

In only five years, Nigeria has advanced from the State Department's human-trafficking "watch list" to its top tier of countries fully complying with standards to eliminate servitude.

That stands as proof that other countries and the world as a whole can do something about this scourge flourishing in the shadows. An

estimated 12 million adults and children have been induced by force, fraud, or coercion to become prostitutes, miners, farmhands, domestics, sweatshop workers – mostly in the developing world.

In its ninth annual report on human trafficking, the State Department said this week that the economic crisis has made people more vulnerable to the false promises and trickery that can lead to enslavement. Of the 175 countries and territories it rated, the 2008 report put 52 of them on its watch list, up from 40 the year before – a 30 percent increase.

And yet, since 2000, more than half of all countries have enacted laws that ban human trafficking. Nongovernmental organizations are working more closely with law enforcement and that's leading to thousands of prosecutions. Last year, nearly 3,000 traffickers were convicted.

It's the law enforcement follow-through that counts most, and that's one reason why Nigeria moved into the top-tier rank. Over the last year, it investigated 209 trafficking cases resulting in 23 convictions – more than double the convictions from the year before.

That number is small considering that 150 million people live in this West African country. Nigeria is a source and a destination for coerced labor. Boys are forced to work as street vendors and beggars, in stone quarries and as domestics. Women and girls are trafficked mostly for the commercial sex trade and as servants.

But Nigeria's anti-trafficking trajectory is moving in the right direction. The government is making a concerted effort to train law enforcement and cooperate internationally. Last year it helped in the arrest of 60 Nigerian trafficking suspects in Europe. It has increased funding for its anti-trafficking program and is assisting victims by working with NGOs to provide shelter, counseling, and vocational training.

Nigeria's efforts are even more remarkable given what happened elsewhere on the continent. Of the seven countries demoted to the report's worst-performing category, six were from Africa (the seventh was Malaysia, where traffickers are exploiting migrants from Burma, or Myanmar).

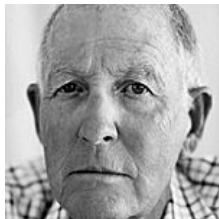
Mr. CdeBaca said several of these countries had stalled in their commitment to curb "hereditary slavery," in which a slave caste serves the same families, sometimes going back hundreds of years. He singled out the West African countries of Chad, Mauritania, and Niger.

Human trafficking occurs in every country, including the United States – which for the first time will be rated in next year's report. No doubt, it, too, can do more to stop this serious crime.

At the end of the day, it's not enough to pass laws banning human trafficking. Cases must be investigated, suspects prosecuted, and traffickers convicted. Nigeria has shown the political will to follow through. Other countries can, too.

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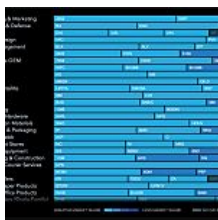
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